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## ECONOMIC GROWTH

(Energy and Environment)

# Alternative power sources for barangay electrification

**THE GOVERNMENT is turning to off-grid solutions to complete its rural electrification program.**

Energy Secretary Angelo T. Reyes said in a statement yesterday that stand-alone energy systems, those not hooked up from the main power grid, will be used to serve the remaining 6% of barangays without electricity. This represents 1,348 barangays which are mostly remote and dispersed, and in Mindanao. The target for complete barangay electrification is 2009. "We are now developing various innovative service delivery mechanisms, and an appropriate policy framework, toward achieving greater access to electricity services," he said.

In his speech at the Washington International Renewable Energy Conference in Washington, D.C. recently, he cited the Alliance for Mindanao Off-grid Renewable Energy (AMORE), a project assisted by the US government, as among the most successful. Using solar and micro-hydro power, AMORE has electrified 11,000 barangays in 400 remote villages in conflict-affected provinces.

"From five pilot projects experimenting with micro-hydro technologies in 1999, the number of renewable energy off-grid initiatives now exceeds a thousand, representing roughly 20% of our rural electrification efforts," Mr. Reyes had said.

A report of the Energy department quoted Mohamed Berdai, director of International Cooperation at the Center for Renewable Energy in Morocco, as saying that the program in that country tested various technical systems, including mini-grid, micro-hydro and photo voltaic applications in homes and public places, as well as a rural fund that subsidized pilot projects.

Arnaldo Vieira de Carvalho, energy specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), also cited parallel successes in Latin America — where 60 million people do not have access to electricity — noting that Chile and Guatemala have employed renewable energy solutions to accelerate rural electrification. Chile, which has island and Andean mountain communities, resorted to off-grid solutions to achieve 90% rural coverage. Guatemala now sources 10% of its energy needs from plants powered by bagasse from sugarcane.

Aside from accessibility problems, Philippine rural electrification has been hampered by lack of funds and peace-and-order problems. The cost of electrifying one rural barangay is estimated to average P2 million. — MKCC

**(Source: Business World, 3/27/08, page S1/3)**